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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

SOLOMON SCHECHTER

M.A., LITT.D. (Cantab.)

AS

PRESIDENT OF THE FACULTY

OF THE

JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

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THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF

Professor Solomon Schechter.

Among the regulations relating to the benedictions which the Jew is bound to utter on various occasions there is one running thus:

הַרְוֵאָה אוֹכֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְבָרֵךְ בְּרוּךְ חֵם הַרְוִים

“He who sees a multitude of Israelites, says the benediction, blessed be He who is the sage of all these mysteries.” So far the Rabbis. By mysteries they do not mean those closet-skeletons of which the author of “Vanity Fair” knew so much, and of which respectability, sometimes even decency, demands that they should remain hidden away in some dark recess. Judaism is not a religion that spies upon personal secrets; and least of all would they be distinguished by a blessing, the great rule being

אֵין מְבָרְכִין עַל הַקִּלְקֵלָה

“Decay and decadence are not the special themes of thanksgiving.” What the Rabbis meant here by “mysteries” was that diversity in feeling and variation in thinking which confer individuality and character upon each member of the species, to such a degree as to crowd our planet with as many microcosms as there are men and women, each governed

by its own laws and moving round its own sun. It is this individualism which practically makes each man a profound and complete mystery to the other, and it was this mystery of individualism, or, as the Rabbis phrase it, "the unending variations of mind and the difference of facial expression" registering our emotions that called forth the admiration of the Rabbis and caused the institution of the blessing.

But nowhere is the force of this mystery more deeply felt than in addressing an audience recruited from the Jewish community of this great city of New York. Like the first man (Adam) in the fable, whose clay (constituting his body) was gathered from the four corners of the earth, this community is made up of the elements drawn from all parts of our globe. But while the miscellaneous factor in the creation of the race aimed, as it was finely explained, at making man a citizen of the world, the same process has had the very opposite effect with our community. Each train of arriving immigrants has brought its own idiosyncrasies and peculiarities, its own ritual and ceremonies, and its own dogmas and dogmatisms, all of which are struggling for existence and perpetuation, thus converting the New World into a multitude of petty Old Worlds. My stay in this country is not of sufficiently long duration to justify any authoritative

statement on my part, but even so far as my short experience goes I can safely say that New York alone could furnish us with an epitome of all the Judaisms or *Richtungen* scattered all over the world, ranging from the precisionism and mysticism of the far East to the advanced radicalism of the far West, in addition to the shadowy no-Judaisms of the Borderland.

Such a community is indeed a mystery. And this mystery has become perplexing; for it is amidst all these Judaisms and no-Judaisms that my colleagues and myself are called upon to create a theological centre which should be all things to all men, reconciling all parts and appealing to all sections of the community. If I understand correctly the intention of those who honored me with their call, and if I interpret my own feelings aright, this school should never become partisan ground or a hotbed of polemics, making "confusion worse confounded." The name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is Peace, and the place erected to His name, and to the cultivation of His Torah, should, to use the figurative language of the Rabbis, be the spot on the horizon "where heaven and earth kiss each other"; while those who study there should in some way participate in and, as it were, anticipate the mission of Elijah, that was to consist not only in solving the

difficulties of the Torah, and removing doubt, but also in bringing back the forcibly estranged, arbitrating between conflicting opinions, and giving peace to the world.

Divine, however, as the work may be—and it could certainly not be accomplished without support from heaven—it is not entirely superhuman, for the creation of which I have just spoken is not a *Creatio ex nihilo*. The foundations are laid and the materials are given.

I am thinking, in the first instance, of the sainted Dr. Sabato Morais, the finest specimen of a Jewish martyr—that is, one who lived, not only died, as a martyr—whose very sight was an inspiration, and whose simplest utterance was a stimulus to faith in God and His Torah. His name will always be remembered for good as the founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary. For this institution he lived and labored the last eleven years of his life, during which he acted as President of the Faculty, in which his spirit will always remain an active and living force: the Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut, the great Jewish scholar and author of the monumental work *Aruch Completum*, the greatest and finest specimen of Hebrew learning ever produced by any Jew on this continent, who acted for the last years of his life as Professor of Midrash and Talmudic

Methodology, and even when death was already overshadowing him spared himself not, and imparted instruction to the students of the Seminary. I am further thinking of the Directors of this institution. The modesty of these Princes in Israel, which shrinks back from all publicity and adheres conscientiously to the great maxim that virtue is and must remain its own reward, forbids me to be explicit. But we may mention here the names of those departed: Mr. Joseph Blumenthal, the President of the old Board of Trustees, to whose signal devotion this institution owes to a considerable extent its continued existence; Mr. Leonard Lewisohn, a devoted Jew, one of our greatest philanthropists, whose benevolence extended to two hemispheres, and who was one of the first founders of the reconstructed Seminary; Dr. Aaron Friedenwald, a scholar and a gentleman, who held the office of director, both in the old and in the newly constituted Board, and whose interest in the institution only ceased with life itself. With the Son of Sirach we should say:

“For a truth these were godly men,
And their hope shall not perish;
With their seed goodness remains sure,
And their inheritance unto children’s children;
Their memory standeth forth forever
And their righteousness shall not be forgotten.”

With such models of energy and conviction, of activity and saintliness, the Seminary should not be at a loss to continue the work which these great souls have prepared and ripened.

It should, however, be pointed out that the directors of the reconstructed Seminary have also given us some excellent hints as to the nature and character of the work before us. Their words are:

“ The Jewish Theological Seminary of America was incorporated by a law of the State of New York, approved February 20, 1902, for the perpetuation of the tenets of the Jewish religion, the cultivation of Hebrew literature, the pursuit of Biblical and Archaeological research, the advancement of Jewish scholarship, the establishment of a library and for the education and training of Jewish rabbis and teachers.”

These words are taken from the Charter, forming the constitution of the Seminary, but, like all constitutions, this also may profitably be submitted to the process of interpretation and expansion. This method we call Midrash. To this Midrash the rest of my address will be largely devoted.

Put into somewhat less technical, or rather less legal, terms, the ideals at which the Directors of this institution aim are the promotion of Jewish learning and the training for the Jewish ministry. By learn-

ing or scholarship we understand a thorough and accurate knowledge of Jewish literature, or at least of parts of it. The duty of accuracy, even in the most minute details of a subject, cannot be shirked. "Through my intercourse with great men," says Humboldt in his *Cosmos*, "I early arrived at the conviction that without a serious attention to details all generalizations and theories of the universe are mere phantasms." I know that the acquiring of details is a very tiresome and wearisome affair, and may well be described in the language of the old Rabbis: "The part of wisdom learned under wrath." But, unfortunately, there is no "snap-shot" process for acquiring learning. It has its methods and laws, as ancient as time itself, and these none can evade or escape. "If a man will tell thee," the old saying was, "I have found Wisdom, but labored not (for it), believe him not." The probability is that he found nothing worth having.

It is true that occasionally we speak of a "Republic of letters," a term which may be interpreted to imply that a certain freedom of treatment is granted to genius. Apart, however, from the fact that we are not all Shakespeares or Goethes, or even Walt Whitmans, it should be remembered that Republicanism does not mean anarchy. Bad grammar, faulty construction, wrong quotations and

mistranslations mean with the student in the domain of literature what lawlessness and anarchy mean to the citizen in common life. And much as we may differ as to the eccentricities of a Walt Whitman, I am sure that we will all agree that ignorance of the language of the sacred literature of Israel in persons undertaking to teach Judaism has by no means any claim upon our forbearance as the vagary of genius, and has to be opposed as objectionable and pernicious.

Not less objectionable than actual ignorance is artificial ignorance. By this I understand that peculiar attitude of mind which, cognizant of the fact that there were such things as the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, with their various movements and revolutions in all departments of human thought, somehow manages to reduce them to a blank, as if they had not been. My friends, they have been! There has been such a thing as a rationalistic school, though not all its members have been rational. There has been such a thing as a critical school, though not all its adherents have been real critics. Arianism of the vulgar sort, and Marcionism of the nineteenth century type, have had their share in this work. There has been such a thing as an historical school, although not all those who were of it interpreted history in the right

way. All these movements are solemn facts, and they can as little be argued away by mere silence as pain and suffering can be removed from the world by the methods of Christian Science.

Mark, too, that there is no intellectual wave that breaks upon our mental horizon which, disastrous as it may appear to us, will not have some beneficial effect in the end. It may wreak desolation when it comes; it may leave the beach strewn with loathsome monsters when it recedes, but at the same time it will deposit a residuum of fresh matter, often fruitful and fructifying. To give one instance from our own history, I will only recall to your minds the Karaitic Schism. Vile and violent were its attacks upon the tradition of the Fathers, and the breach is not healed to this very day, but it had also the blessed effect of giving a wholesome impetus to the study of the Bible, which resulted in producing a school of Grammarians and Exegetes, and perhaps also of Massorites, such as Judaism had never seen before.

Thus these movements may all contain grains and germs of truth, or at least may provide the *nídus* for the further development of truth, and with all this the student must be made acquainted. What they have to offer may not always be pleasant to hear, but this must be accepted as a judgment of

God, passed upon us for allowing our inheritance—especially the Bible—to be turned over to strangers. At the same time the follies and extravagances, occasionally also the ineffable ignorance, displayed by some of the leaders of these movements should also be exposed, for the demand they make for blind faith in the hypotheses they advance is even more exacting than that made by the old orthodoxies, and young men should be warned against their pretensions. “Even the youngest among us may sometimes err,” was the answer of a Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, to a forward youth, and similarly I venture to express the possibility that even the “newest” among us may sometimes go wrong.

The crown and climax of all learning is research. The object of this searching is truth—that truth which gives unity to history and harmony to the phenomena of nature, and brings order into a universe in which the naked eye perceives only strife and chance. But while in search of this truth, of which man is hardly permitted more than a faint glimpse, the student not only re-examines the old sources, but is on the constant lookout for fresh material and new fields of exploration. These enable him to supply a link here and to fill out a gap there, thus contributing his humble share to the sum

total of truth, which, by the grace of God, is in a process of constant self-revelation.

I may, perhaps, point out in passing, as I did on a somewhat similar occasion, "that this passionate devotion to the study of ancient MSS., which you may possibly have observed in some students, has not its source in mere antiquarianism or love of curios. The famous R. Nissim Gaon, the correspondent of R. Sherira and R. Hai Gaon, the author of the *Mafteth*, says, in the introduction to his work, 'And I entreat everybody who will profit by the study of this book to pray to God for me and cause me to find mercy whether I am alive or dead.' Nowadays we are not always in a praying mood. With Hegel, some of us believe that thinking is also praying. But the sensation we experience in our work is not unlike that which should accompany our devotions. Every discovery of an ancient document giving evidence of a bygone world is, if undertaken in the right spirit—that is, for the honor of God and the truth and not for the glory of self—an act of resurrection in miniature. How the past suddenly rushes in upon you with all its joys and woes! And there is a spark of a human soul like yours come to light again after a disappearance of centuries, crying for sympathy and mercy even as R. Nissim did. You dare not neglect the appeal and

slay this soul again. Unless you choose to become another Cain you must be the keeper of your brother and give him a fair hearing. You pray with him if he happens to be a liturgist; you grieve with him if the impress left by him in your mind is that of suffering; you fight for him if his voice is that of ardent partisanship, and you even doubt with him if the garb in which he makes his reappearance is that of an honest sceptic—'Souls can only be kissed through the medium of sympathy.' "

But it is with truth as it is with other ideals and sacred possessions of man. "Every generation," the ancient Rabbis say, "which did not live to see the rebuilding of the Holy Temple must consider itself as if it had witnessed its destruction." Similarly we may say that every age which has not made some essential contribution to the erection of the Temple of Truth and real *Wissenschaft* is bound to look upon itself as if it had been instrumental in its demolition. For it is these fresh contributions and the opening of new sources, with the new currents they create, that keep the intellectual and the spiritual atmosphere in motion and impart to it life and vigor. But when, through mental inertia and moral sloth, these fresh sources are allowed to dry, stagnation and decay are sure to set in. The same things happen which came to pass when Israel's sanctuary

was consumed in fire. Said R. Phineas ben Yair: "Since the day on which the Holy Temple was destroyed the *Socíí* חברים and the sons of freedom lie under the cloud of shame, and their heads are covered (in mourning); men of (real) deeds are neglected, while the 'men of elbow' and the 'masters of the tongue' gain strength."

I have thus far spoken of the Seminary as a place of learning. We must now proceed to consider it in its particular aspect as a training school for the Jewish ministry. Now, we all agree that the office of a Jewish minister is to teach Judaism; he should accordingly receive such a training as to enable him to say: "*Judaeicí níhíl a me alíenum puto.*" "I regard nothing Jewish as foreign to me." He should know everything Jewish—Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Liturgy, Jewish ethics and Jewish philosophy; Jewish history and Jewish mysticisms, and even Jewish folklore. None of these subjects, with its various ramifications, should be entirely strange to him.

Remember, my friends, that there is no waste in the world of thought. Every good action, the mystics say, creates an angel; and every real thought, it may be said, creates even something better; it creates men and women. In spite of all our "modernity," most of our sentiments are "nothing else but organized traditions; our thoughts nothing else but

reminiscences, conscious and unconscious," while in our actions we are largely executive officers, carrying out the acts passed by a wise legislation of many years ago. We dare not neglect any part of this great intellectual bequest but at a serious risk and peril to ourselves. And the risk is the greater in Jewish literature—a literature pregnant with "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," whose very pseudography became the sacred books of other nations, whose most homely metaphors were converted from literature into dogma. Nay, the very misunderstanding and misinterpretation of its terminology have given rise to a multitude of sects and orthodoxies and heresies still dividing humanity.

It was with the purpose of avoiding this risk that we—my colleagues and I—tried to draw up the curriculum of studies for the faculty, in such a way as to include in it almost every branch of Jewish literature. We cannot, naturally, hope to carry the student through all these vast fields of learning at the cultivation of which humanity has now worked for nearly four thousand years. But this fact must not prevent us from making the attempt to bring the students on terms of acquaintance at least with all those manifestations of Jewish life and Jewish thought which may prove useful to them as future

ministers, and suggestive and stimulating to them as prospective scholars.

It is hardly necessary to remark that the Jewish ministry and Jewish scholarship are not irreconcilable. The usefulness of the minister does not increase in an *inverse ratio* to his knowledge—as little as bad grammar is specially conducive to morality and holiness. Zunz's motto was, "Real knowledge creates action" (*thatenerzeugend*) and the existence of such men as R. Saadya Gaon and R. Hai Gaon, Maimonides, and Nachmanides, R. Joseph Caro and R. Isaac Abarbanel, Samson Raphael Hirsch and Abraham Geiger, and an innumerable host of other spiritual kings in Israel, all "mighty in the battles of the Torah," and voluminous authors, and at the same time living among their people and for their people and influencing their contemporaries, and still at this very moment swaying the actions and opinions of men—all these bear ample testimony to the truth of Zunz's maxim. No, ignorance is not such bliss as to make special efforts to acquire it. There is no cause to be afraid of much learning, or, rather, of much teaching. The difficulty under which we labor is rather that there are subjects which cannot be taught, and yet do form an essential part of the equipment of a Jewish minister.

But first let me say a few words about the general

religious tendency this Seminary will follow. I am not unaware that this is a very delicate point, and prudence would dictate silence or evasion. But life would hardly be worth living without occasional blundering, "the only relief from dull correctness." Besides, if there be in American history one fact more clearly proved than any other it is that "Know-nothingism" was an absolute and miserable failure. I must not fall into the same error. And thus, sincerely asking forgiveness of all my dearest friends and dearest enemies with whom it may be my misfortune to differ, I declare, in all humility, but most emphatically, that I do know something. And this is that the religion in which the Jewish ministry should be trained must be specifically and purely Jewish, without any alloy or adulteration. Judaism must stand or fall by that which distinguishes it from other religions as well as by that which it has in common with them. Judaism is *not* a religion which does not oppose itself to anything in particular. Judaism is opposed to any number of things, and says distinctly "thou shalt not." It permeates the whole of your life. It demands control over all your actions, and interferes even with your menu. It sanctifies the seasons, and regulates your history, both in the past and in the future. Above all, it teaches that disobedience is the strength of

sin. It insists upon the observance both of the spirit and of the letter; spirit without letter belongs to the species known to the mystics as "nude souls" נשמתין ערטילאין wandering about in the universe without balance and without consistency, the play of all possible currents and changes in the atmosphere. In a word, Judaism is absolutely incompatible with the abandonment of the Torah. Nay, the very prophet or seer must bring his imprimatur from the Torah. The assertion that the destruction of the Law is its fulfilment is a mere paradox, and recalls strongly the doctrines of Sir Boyle Roche, "the inimitable maker of Irish bulls. He declared emphatically that he would give up a part, and, if necessary, the *whole* of the constitution, to preserve the *remainder!*"

President Abraham Lincoln, the wisest and greatest of rulers, addressed Congress on some occasion of great emergency with the words: "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history." Nor can we, my friends. The past, with its long chain of events, with its woes and joys, with its tragedies and romances, with its customs and usages, and above all with its bequest of the Torah, the great entail of the children of Israel, has become an integral and inalienable part of ourselves, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. We must make an end to these

constant amputations if we do not wish to see the body of "Israel" bleed to death before our very eyes. We must leave off talking about Occidentalizing our religion—as if the Occident has ever shown the least genius for religion—or freeing the conscience by abolishing various laws. These, and similar platitudes and stock phrases borrowed from Christian apologetics, must be abandoned entirely if we do not want to drift slowly but surely into Paulinism, which entered the world as the deadliest enemy of Judaism, pursued it through all its course and is still finding its abettors among us, working for their own destruction. Lord, forgive them, for they know nothing. Those who are entrusted with carrying out the purpose of this institution, which, as you have seen, aims at the perpetuation of the tenets of the Jewish religion, both pupils and masters, must faithfully and manfully maintain their loyalty to the Torah. There is no other Jewish religion but that taught by the Torah and confirmed by history and tradition, and sunk into the conscience of Catholic Israel.

I have just hinted at the desirability of masters and pupils working for one common end. You must not think that our intention is to convert this school of learning into a drill ground where young men will be forced into a certain groove of thinking, or,

rather, not thinking; and after being equipped with a few devotional texts, and supplied with certain catchwords, will be let loose upon an unsuspecting public to proclaim their own virtues and the infallibility of their masters. Nothing is further from our thoughts. I once heard a friend of mine exclaim angrily to a pupil: "Sir, how dare you always agree with me?" I do not even profess to agree with myself always, and I would consider my work, to which, with the help of God, I am going to devote the rest of my life, a complete failure if this institution would not in the future produce such extremes as on the one side a raving mystic who would denounce me as a sober Philistine; on the other side, an advanced critic, who would rail at me as a narrow-minded fanatic, while a third devotee of strict orthodoxy would raise protest against any critical views I may entertain. "We take," says Montaigne, "other men's knowledge on trust, which is idle and superficial learning. We must make it our own." The Rabbis express the same thought with allusion to Ps. I., 2, which they explain to mean that what is first—at the initiation of man into the Law—God's Torah, becomes, after a sufficient study, man's own Torah. Nay, God even deigns to descend to man's own level so as not to interfere with his individuality and powers of conception. I reproduce in para-

phrase a passage from a Midrash: "Behold now, how the voice of Sinai goes forth to all in Israel attuned to the capacity of each; appealing to the sages according to their wisdom; to the virile according to their strength; to the young according to their aspiring youthfulness, and to the children and babes according to their innocence; aye, even to the women according to their motherhood." All that I plead for is that the voice should come from Sinai, not from Golgotha; that it should be the voice of Jacob, not of Esau. The Torah gave spiritual accommodation for thousands of years to all sorts and conditions of men, sages, philosophers, scholars, mystics, casuists, school men and sceptics; and it should also prove broad enough to harbor the different minds of the present century. Any attempt to place the centre of gravity outside of the Torah must end in disaster. We must not flatter ourselves that we shall be allowed to land somewhere midway, say in some Omar Khayyám Cult or in some Positivists' Society or in some other agnostic makeshift. No, my friends, there are laws of gravitation in the spiritual as there are in the physical world; we cannot create halting places at will. We must either remain faithful to history, or go the way of all flesh, and join the great majority. The teaching in the Seminary will be in keeping with this spirit,

and thus largely confined to the exposition and elucidation of historical Judaism in its various manifestations.

But as I have hinted before, not everything can be taught. I am referring to those things undefinable, which may be best described by using the Talmudic phrase "things handed over to the heart" which cannot be imparted by word of mouth, or by any visible sign. Take, for instance, the Fifty-first Psalm, commencing "Have mercy upon me, O God!" We have the means of teaching how to parse the Hebrew and how to render it into fair English, but we are utterly helpless should we attempt to convey any idea of the agony and anguish which wrung from the Psalmist this cry—of the misery and bitterness which he felt at the thought that transgression and sin may lead to his being cast away from the presence of God, and to the loss of his holy spirit; and of the sudden exaltation and gladness he experienced in anticipating the time when a broken heart and a contrite spirit would bring back to him the lost joy of salvation and restore the interrupted communion between the repentant son and his Father in heaven. Or take the concluding lines of the *Malchíyoth* benediction on New Year's Day that read: "Our God and God of our fathers, reign Thou in Thy glory over the whole universe and be exalted over

the whole earth in Thine honor, and shine forth in the splendor and excellence of Thy might upon all the inhabitants of our world." We can easily lecture on the history of this prayer, and even make a guess as to its date and authorship; but we should certainly fail were we to try to make one understand what the Kingdom of God on earth really meant for the saints of Israel, whose whole life was nothing else than a preparation for entering into the Kingdom. Wooden theologians speak of a theocracy, as of a sort of Jewish hierarchy after the Roman model, only with a Rabbi Maximus as its head. This was not the ideal for which so many noble men and women suffered martyrdom and which inspired the great "Unknown" to his divine poem *יאתיו כל לעבדך* the Jewish "Marseillaise." It was the blissful vision of love triumphant, righteousness triumphant, truth triumphant, which animated and dictated these lines. But here I am explaining dark riddles by obscure terms. Or lastly, take the first lines of R. Jehuda Ha-Levi's poem on the advent of the Sabbath, running thus: "To Thy love I drink my cup." The Sabbath was for him a reality in which Israel's sweet singer saw a reflex of the great Sabbath when the Kingdom of God would be established. But how one can fall in love with such an abstract idea as a span of time can only be divined by love itself.

In the famous Praise of Wisdom the Sophia or the Torah proclaims: "I am the mother of fair love and fear and knowledge and holy hope." But it is only filial devotion which will elicit mother's answer and touch the mystic chord of things undefinable, only transmissible through the means of an appeal from soul to soul. But suppose a person has no soul, or, what comes to the same thing, persuades himself he has none? "Saving souls" is a favorite phrase with theologians. The soul being, according to Jewish mystics—long before Emerson—a spark of the divine essence itself, I never believed it to be in much need of artificial aids to salvation. The "Spirit shall return unto God who gave it," even against the will of theologians if need be. Our real difficulty is how to help the men without souls!

Another problem presenting itself is how we are to teach the subject or thing called Life. I hardly need say that by Life I do not understand skill in arranging social and other attractions, or ingenuity in inventing sensational sermon headings. This is not Life. Everything tending to what is common or sensational must needs starve our better selves and ultimately result in spiritual death. What I mean by this term is the capacity for dealing with those occasions in our earthly career which by reason of intense joys or sorrow or the tender

sympathy which they evoke crowd years into moments, and form, so to speak, portions of life in condensation. These occasions have always been controlled and assisted by religion. The Catholic Church made of some, sacraments, as in the case of marriage and death, and it has also created special Orders devoted to the work among the needy and the helpless. The Protestant Church has also its Settlements and has introduced into its seminaries pastoral theology, aiming, among other things, to instruct its clergy in the works of love and charity. But it must be confessed that we are still somewhat behind in this last respect.

Pray let there be no misunderstanding about this point. The discovery of the virtue of charity is not quite contemporaneous with the coining of that barbaric word Altruism. The administration of charity was one of the earliest functions of the Synagogue from which it was borrowed by the primitive Church like so many other institutions. But recognizing no difference between the laity and the priesthood, or rabbihood, the exercise of this function was not limited to any Order or special caste. The practice of the work of loving kindness, or *Gemilath Chasadim*, a term including everything we understand by philanthropic and social work, had, as you know from your prayer book, no fixed meas-

ure, and all classes of the community shared it. With regard to visiting the sick and ministering to the dying, I will only call to mind the oldest Jewish Society, the חברה קדישא a kind of Sacred Brotherhood, whose duty it was to nurse those who had nobody to attend to them, to be present at the supreme moment of man's existence, and to read the prescribed prayers there, to arrange and prepare for the funeral procession and decent burial, and to comfort the mourners by reciting prayers and "speaking to their hearts." All these services were performed voluntarily and gratuitously, and those who performed them came from all classes of the community, men and women.

But times have changed; charity has become to some extent—I hope not entirely—a science, and a certain knowledge of political economy and sociology is required for its proper administration. It is therefore deemed advisable that the minister, who, as a rule, is connected with our charitable institutions, either as an active member of the board of management or as the spiritual adviser of the directors, should receive some training in the aforementioned subjects. Again we live now in the age of specialization. Funerals and burials have been raised to the dignity of a fine art, and praying has become a close profession. The old Sacred Brother-

hoods had thus to disappear, and their work mostly devolves now upon the minister. But how should we approach this part of our instruction? It should be remembered that the old Sacred Brotherhoods were, as already said, voluntary societies, and the very fact of a man's joining them testified to his fitness to engage in the works of mercy and loving kindness. But a man may show the most brilliant record of undergraduate days and yet be utterly wanting in tact, delicacy, patience, sympathy, forbearance and similar qualities necessary for the office of pastor. Sometimes a certain unwillingness to allow students to share in work of this kind is shown on the part of those who have a right to protest. The Jerusalem Talmud records a story of a famous Rabbi of Cæsarea who sent his son to Tiberias "to acquire merit there," by studying Torah in the Rabbinic Academies of that city. But the boy, instead of attending to his lessons and lectures, became a "Gomel Chessed," or, as we should now say, devoted himself to social work. His specialty was, it seems, that of burying the dead. Whereupon his father wrote to him: "Is it because there were no graves in Cæsarea that I sent thee to Tiberias?" This happened somewhere about the end of the third century, but in this respect times have not changed as far as my knowledge of universities

and seminaries goes. Parents and guardians still object to their sons or wards attending funerals instead of lectures. But there is also another grave consideration. The social work included under the name of *Gemilath Chasadim* forms in Judaism a part of Israel's great Imitatio Dei. The Holy One, blessed be He, set the example Himself of performing deeds of kindness to His creatures, and it is incumbent upon the whole of Israel, "the suite of the King," as the ancients express it, to fashion their ways after the King. And I consider it not without danger to create a religious aristocracy which might soon claim the King entirely for themselves, and crowd the rest of us out from His Divine Presence. Such things have happened in other communities and may also happen to us when we create a separate class of *religieux* with a special purpose of assisting us in the most sacred, but also the most sensitive and weakest, moments of our being.

George Eliot, in a letter to a spiritualist correspondent, says: "The great thing is to do without chloroform." Judaism not only did without chloroform, but, retaining its freshness and vigor, it also did without crutches, and found its way to heaven without any aid from man: it never employed spiritual derricks. If a Jew wanted to pray, he prayed. If he felt any anxiety about his soul, he said: "Into

Thy hands I commit my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, God of Truth." If he felt the need of religious comfort he read a Psalm or two and had a good cry over that, and he received assurance; and if he was in the home of a dying friend he read: "Hear, O Israel!" שמע ישראל and a few other verses acknowledging the unity of God and His reign, and he felt sure that both he and his departed friend would have their share in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now, on account of the frequent amputations we have lost our vigor and have suddenly grown old and seem to be in need of artificial support like other denominations. The support has to be created. The circumstances require it. But, as I have said, the experiment is risky, and we can only pray with the Psalmist that God lead us in the path of righteousness for His name's sake.

However, I will not dwell any longer on our troubles and difficulties. Be they ever so many, and ever so serious, the old dictum of the rabbi still holds good: "It is not incumbent upon thee to finish the work, neither art thou free to desist from it," and least of all dare we desist from our work; we whom Providence has transplanted into this great and glorious country, and each of whom may verily say with Joseph, "God did send me before you to preserve life."

My friends, in a letter by Maimonides, addressed to the Wise Men of Lunel, there occurs a passage to the following effect: "Be it known unto you, my masters and friends, that in these hard times none are left to lift up the standard of Moses and inquire into the world of the Rabbis but you. I am certain that you and the cities near you are continually establishing places of learning and that you are men of wisdom and understanding. From all other places the Torah has utterly disappeared. The majority of the great countries are (spiritually) dead. The minority is *in extremis* while three or four places are in a state of convalescence. * * * It is also known unto you what persecutions have been decreed against the Jewish population of the West (of Europe). There is no help left to us but in you, our brethren, even the men of our kindred. Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly, for our people and for the cities of God, since you are manly men and men of power."

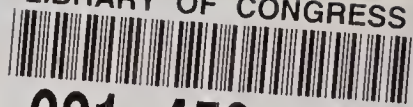
This letter was written by Maimonides some seven hundred years ago. But how little times have changed. Substitute the words East or Northeast for West, and you have the tragedy repeated before your very eyes. It is now the East—from our part of the globe—which is old and ill, where persecution has been decreed, and which, if not actually dead,

is very nearly *in extremis*; while it is the West that is throbbing with life and healthy activity, which is full of men of understanding and wisdom, of power and of influence. To these I venture to repeat the words of Scripture in the sense in which they were used by Maimonides: "Be of good courage and let us behave ourselves valiantly, for ourselves, and for the cities of our God." Perhaps I may also repeat here another sentence of Maimonides: "Think not of thyself slightly, and do not despair of perfection." Whether we shall reach perfection in this or any other task relating to Judaism which the great men of Israel of this country have set before themselves only the future can decide. But there is no reason for despairing; and the possibility of failure must in no way deter us.

There is a passage in the Talmud: "It is not a great honor for the princess when her praise comes from her friend; it should come from her rival." Ernest Renan, who never quite laid aside his St. Sulpice frock, and was never entirely free from Aryan prejudices, was certainly a rival, but he was a man of genius, and in spite of himself could not help occasionally saying true things; and his words are: "There will continue to be in Israel profound dreamers to assert that the work of God will never be complete until His true saints shall reign therein

(in the world). At the root of the lofty morality of this people is a longing that is never satisfied. The true Israelite is he who, in his discontent, thirsts always for the future, and the race is not yet ready to fail." By the help of God we shall not fail.

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